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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 DJIBOUTI 000734

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF AND AF/E

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [ET](#) [ER](#) [IS](#) [DJ](#)

SUBJECT: CJTF HOA COMMANDER'S FAREWELL CALL ON PRESIDENT GUELLEH

Classified By: AMBASSADOR MARGUERITA D. RAGSDALE.  
REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

1. (C) Summary: For President Ismail Omar Guelleh, Djibouti's participation in the Global War on Terrorism is "an honor." He wants an end to conflict and hostility in the Horn of Africa region and is working directly with the President of the African Union to bring about a face to face meeting between Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi and Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki. During the farewell call by General Mastin Robeson, Commander of the Combined Joint Task Force Horn of Africa (CJTF HOA) based at Camp Lemonier in Djibouti, Guelleh said he hoped Ethiopia would take the first step. Guelleh also welcomed General Robeson's informal proposal for billeting and training of Ugandan, Kenyan and perhaps other platoons, at Camp Lemonier. He told Robeson that such acts can help facilitate an improved political climate in the region. Guelleh hailed Robeson as a "pioneer" who had taken responsibility as Commander of CJTF HOA and created a good working environment for relations between very different peoples. Guelleh expects to attend the May 22-23 Tunis Arab League Summit and said the situation in the Israeli-occupied territories should top the summit's agenda. End summary.

2. (U) General Mastin Robeson, Commander of the Combined Joint Task Force Horn of Africa (CJTF HOA) based at Camp Lemonier in Djibouti, paid a farewell call May 20 on Djibouti's President Ismail Omar Guelleh. General Robeson was accompanied in the call by CJTF HOA incoming commander, General Samuel Helland, by Ambassador, and by CJTF HOA political advisor Lange Schermerhorn. Hassan Said Khaireh, Director of National Security Services also sat in on the meeting.

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Djibouti and Global War on Terrorism  
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3. (C) Robeson praised Guelleh as the strongest friend of the U.S. in the Horn of Africa region and attributed his own success over the past year to Guelleh's personal support. He thanked Guelleh as well for the cooperation of Djibouti's military leadership, specifically General Fathi Ahmed Hussein, Major General of Djiboutian Armed Forces and General Zakaria Ibrahim Cheik, Major General for Djiboutian Defense, and for the opportunity given to CJTF HOA to partner with them in recent flood relief efforts. Robeson also spoke of the strong relations that have existed between him and French forces, especially with their commander, General Gerard Pons. Camp Lemonier, Robeson continued, was the most visible sign of friendship between the U.S. and Djibouti. "You never said no and you have taken care of us," Robeson added. He also noted that plans are being developed in Washington to expand Camp Lemonier. Guelleh responded that it was an honor for Djibouti to have contributed to the war against terrorism and to fighting what he described as "these criminal gangsters, especially in this region." He said he had not yet seen the plan for expansion of the Camp, but would like to and would study it.

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Ethiopia-Eritrea Conflict  
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4. (C) Robeson raised with Guelleh his just-concluded farewell trip in the Horn of Africa. He said he had met with President Isaias in Eritrea and with Prime Minister Meles in Ethiopia. Guelleh asked Robeson for his views on why Isaias refused to see General Abizaïd during the latter's recent swing through the region. Robeson responded that Isaias had described the event as a misunderstanding. He added that Isaias does appear to demonstrate concern about the growing hostility between Eritrea and Ethiopia. However, Robeson said, the two men are quite different.

5. (C) Guelleh acknowledged the tension between the two states and supported the view that the conflict involves distinct personalities. Meles and Isaias "were as brothers previously," Guelleh continued. "Now they are enemies." He urged caution when talking with both men. "Both are tough," Guelleh said, and "there is a need to understand deeply the best means for their cooperation in order that they can

achieve a better understanding of each other in social, political and other areas."

16. (C) Guelleh expressed hope that Ethiopia would take the first step to find a solution to the Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict and to compromise. "Someone should say that there are principles that should be applied. Eritrea is saying implement the decision of the Boundary Commission, then talk. Ethiopia is saying let us talk first because there is no guarantee that accepting the Boundary Commission's findings will make for a permanent peace." From Ethiopia's perspective, Guelleh said, one needs to see how the border ruling will affect people on the ground.

17. (C) Robeson replied that he hoped a regionalization of focus would help heal these kinds of differences. He urged a NATO-like arrangement for the region that could achieve some of the same results seen in the aftermath of World War II in Europe. Guelleh responded positively, saying he believed that with respect to Eritrea and Ethiopia, a lack of understanding exists from the top. When two peoples are so inter-linked, their Heads of State should be obliged to talk. Guelleh expressed his conviction that if Meles and Isaias could talk to each other "if only for one hour," they would be able to resolve their differences. Guelleh told Robeson that Djibouti is working directly with the Chairman of the African Union to achieve this outcome.

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Looking Towards the Broader Region  
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18. (C) Robeson noted the initial encouraging signals he had received in response to CJTF HOA's regional Chiefs of Defense conference which took place in late April, especially to proposals for billeting and training an Ugandan and Kenyan platoon, and perhaps other troops at Camp Lemonier. Guelleh responded that Djibouti "would be very happy to work with them." He continued that if responsible working level people from countries in the region can have good relations with each other, that would facilitate an improved political climate in the region.

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The Arab League Summit  
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19. (C) Ambassador raised with Guelleh his planned departure the following day for Tunis to attend the Arab League Summit. Guelleh confirmed his attendance and said he hoped the session would be fruitful. A key item that needs to be discussed, he stated, is the situation in the Israeli-occupied territories and the activities of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon with respect to the Palestinians. On a positive note, Guelleh said, Israel had apologized for the most recent outcome of its actions in the Rafah refugee camp in Gaza. He said it is important to press firmly for a two-state solution to the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. Ambassador responded that President Bush has reiterated on more than one occasion his strong support for such a solution. She also noted that the U.S. had abstained in a mid-week vote at the U.N. on a resolution on Israel's incursion into Gaza.

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Change of Command  
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10. (C) Robeson referred President Guelleh to his successor, General Helland, and briefed on Helland's achievements during his long military career. Helland acknowledged Guelleh's welcoming response. He was pleased to be in Djibouti and looked forward to working very closely with Guelleh and the members of his team. Guelleh stated that all in the Horn of Africa region welcome the presence of America. He described Robeson as a "pioneer," who had taken responsibility as Commander of CJTF HOA, and had created "something from nothing" while developing real relations with components in the region. The result, Guelleh said, has been the creation of a good working climate of relations between very different peoples.

11. (C) General Robeson cleared on this cable prior to his departure from Djibouti.  
RAGSDALE